



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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JOINT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, FAMILIES
AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

July 17, 2017

The Honorable Alice Peisch, House Chair
Joint Committee on the Education
State House, Room 473G
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Sonia Chang-Diaz, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on the Education
State House, Room 111
Boston, MA 02133

RE: H.2872 An Act relative to dyslexia, H.330 An Act relative to defining and providing screening for dyslexia, S.294 An Act relative to students with dyslexia, and S.313 An Act relative to dyslexia.

I am writing in support of H.2872, *An Act relative to dyslexia*, H.330 *An Act relative to defining and providing screening for dyslexia*, S.294 *An Act relative to students with dyslexia*, and S.313 *An Act relative to dyslexia*, of which I am a cosponsor.

As the Chair of the House Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities and as an advanced practice psychiatric nurse I believe these bills will enable children with learning disabilities in Massachusetts to obtain the best education possible and enhance the social and emotional welfare of these students.

Research shows that without diagnosis or early intervention for learning disabilities, including dyslexia, children are more likely to become depressed, anxious, and even suicidal¹. When children are struggling to learn because they cannot read at grade level it can become stressful and put these students at a disadvantage. Currently the Commonwealth waits for signs that a child is failing in specific subject matters before considering further testing and intervention. By the time a child is tested there may already be signs of social and emotional strain.

¹ William N. Bender and Maureen E. Wall (1994) Learning Disability Quarterly, Vol. 17, No. 4, Social-Emotional Development(Autumn, 1994), pp. 327

Early screening has the potential to reduce reading failure and is cost effective. Massachusetts already screens for vision, hearing and posture when a child enters school, and adding dyslexia screening will provide greater opportunity for intervention, which is extremely valuable.

Further research shows that students with learning disabilities are more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system and even eventually the criminal justice system². Reports have also shown that many adults who enter the criminal justice system are diagnosed for the first time with a learning disability once they enter prison facilities and cognitive disabilities are the most prevalent disability amount all inmates in the country³. Adaptive behavior, misconduct, impulsivity, and attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder seem to be more prevalent in children with learning disabilities, and dyslexia. This hampers their ability to read or learn. A child's disruptive behavior can be exacerbated when he or she is unable to read at grade level, causing the student to grow frustrated and act out. By screening at age five for dyslexia the Commonwealth can help eliminate the school to prison pipeline.

Additionally, adequate testing, tutoring and fair representation in Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meetings can be extremely cumbersome and expensive for most families. A family's ability to pay should in no way impact a child's ability to be diagnosed properly with a learning disability. Unfortunately we see a disproportionate number of students of color not receiving the services they need to succeed. If all children in the Commonwealth received screening at age five, then our education system would be more equitable and cost effective.

Early screenings allow teachers and parents to focus on early literacy, instruction on phonemic awareness and providing skills that children with dyslexia need to succeed. Fewer students will fail and fewer students will be in jeopardy of social and emotional developmental delays leading to their involvement in the juvenile and criminal justice system.

For all these reasons, I respectfully ask the Joint Committee on Education to release H.2872, H.330, S.294, and S.313 with a favorable report. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important matter.

In appreciation,



Representative Kay Khan
11th Middlesex District

² William N. Bender and Maureen E. Wall. Learning Disability Quarterly, Vol. 17, No. 4, Social-Emotional Development (1994), pp. 332

³ Jennifer Bronson, Ph.D., Laura M. Maruschak, and Marcus Berzofsky, Dr.P.H., Disabilities Among Prison and Jail Inmates, 2011–12. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs Bureau of Justice Statistics (2015), pp.3